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Holm, Fynn

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Drugs and the Politics of Consumption in Japan

Veranstalter: Judith Vitale/ Ulrich Brandenburg, Historisches Seminar, Universität Zürich

Datum, Ort: 22.08.2019–24.08.2019, Zürich

Bericht von: Fynn Holm, Asien-Orient-Institut, Universität Zürich

The aim of the international workshop „Drugs and the Politics of Consumption in Japan“ was to explore how political, economic, social, and cultural processes shaped perceptions of drugs in Japan from the pre-modern to the postwar period. JUDITH VITALE (Zurich) opened the conference with remarks on the consumption of drugs in Japan prior to the Meiji Restoration of 1868. She stressed that the boundaries of accepted and deviant uses of drugs are shifting over time.

In Panel 1, ANNA ANDREEVA (Heidelberg) focused on the strategies employed by Buddhist scholar-monks and physicians for managing childbirth and related pain relief in elite households in medieval Japan. Many of the pain relief substances and „healing rituals“ used in medieval Japan originated from South and East Asia, showing the extent of the transcultural circulation of medical knowledge as well as commodities in pre-modern Asia. JONAS RÜEGG (Cambridge, MA) argued that different concerns led the modern and pre-modern state in banning or promoting particular „drugs“ respectively. Whereas „magic mushrooms“ or hemp were indigenous plants in Japan in the Edo period (1603–1868), regional governments encouraged the plantation of newly introduced addictive substances like tobacco and sugar. Meanwhile, medicinal products imported through the Nagasaki trade from China contributed heavily to a trade deficit. The discussant, DAVID HOWELL (Cambridge, MA), noted that in the Edo period stimulants were often considered luxury products. For elite groups, the consumption of these commodities by commoners was of concern not because of their addictive nature but rather because their consumption undermined a clear social distinction.

In Panel 2, KŌJI OZAKI (Nishinomiya)

discussed the production and distribution of opium in nineteenth-century Japan. He showed that there was a gap between the reality that Japan needed opium for medicinal uses and the government's insistence on banning the import of opium. As a countermeasure against opium smuggling, domestic production of opium was encouraged and developed rapidly after 1873, especially in the Osaka region. After a series of natural disasters destroyed a large part of the rice harvests in the 1880s, poppy production was further disseminated in the region and seen as a „godsend“ by locals. ULRICH BRANDENBURG (Zurich) expanded on the transnational opium connection by exploring the role of opium as a driving force in Meiji Japan's ventures into the Middle East. After 1910, Japanese authorities in Taiwan no longer bought opium on London export markets but directly from the Ottoman Empire and Iran. Brandenburg argued that Japan had not much bargaining power in the purchase of opium because of the high domestic demand. In the discussion, MARTIN DUSINBERRE (Zurich) emphasized that both papers presented Osaka as a node of knowledge production and lauded the papers for discussing the multilevel facets of „transimperial“ knowledge circulation through the lens of a single commodity. According to him, contributions like these, force us to rethink the epistemological framing of „Japan“ after 1868.

In his keynote lecture, JOHN JENNINGS (Colorado Springs) looked back on the writing of his seminal book „The Opium Empire,” published in 1997. Jennings recalled that the book was not widely discussed at the time. He argued that in the 1990s, though political and societal debates focused on addictive substances, American historians considered drugs a topic not worth researching. Furthermore, Japanese historians then were mostly interested in a Japanese nation-state framework, and rarely addressed transnational connections. Twenty-two years later, a paradigm shift has occurred, and conferences like the present one in Zurich suggest new approaches in the history of drugs.

WILLIAM GERVASE CLARENCE-SMITH (London) opened Panel 3 with a paper on the history of the company Samuel Samuel

& Co. The company imported opium to Taiwan, after the establishment of the Japanese state opium monopoly in 1896. Supplying the Japanese Monopoly Bureau was lucrative, but in 1912 the House of Samuel temporarily lost its opium contract, for abusively raising the import price. In 1926, after a series of scandals, the company gave up its opium contract and ceased to trade with Japanese partners altogether. Clarence-Smith argued that the company was highly concerned with its public reputation, but showed no ethical concerns about selling opium. TIMOTHY YANG (Athens, Georgia) showed that Japan's medical authorities attempted to modernize Japan's pharmaceutical market, by driving out traditional therapeutics. In reaction to new government regulations, however, pharmaceutical companies successfully rebranded patent medicines as home medicines that supplemented professional medical treatments. In the last paper of the panel, HUNG BIN HSU (Tainan) discussed opium consumption in Taiwan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He argued that opium-smoking, a popular entertainment in the late Qing period (1644–1911), was gradually regarded as an „uncivilized“ social activity under Japanese rule. By the end of the Japanese colonial period, social spaces for opium-smoking were dramatically reduced, leaving smokers no other choice than to retreat into private spaces. In the discussion, HARALD FISCHER-TINÉ (Zurich) commented that consumption practices were a means to bring modernity to the Japanese empire, while potentially being a form of resistance against the Japanese colonial project.

In Panel 4, MIRIAM KINGSBERG KADIA (Boulder, Colorado) stressed the significance of narcotics in Japanese fiction. *Belle époque* writers (1918–1948) deployed narcotics as a trope to index Japan's changing geopolitical position and aspirations through the intertwined constructs of race, gender, and nationality. Kingsberg Kadia argued that a common trope was the supposed superiority of the Japanese, who did not take drugs, while writers portrayed foreign narcotic users as a threat to the social order. JUDITH VITALE (Zurich) explored discourses about the drug problem against the background of inter-war

anxieties of social and moral decay in Japan. Despite legal reforms and stricter state control over the trade and sale of opiates after the First World War, there were no significant barriers placed on the end consumers. In the 1920s, however, Japanese doctors problematized medical addiction among the middle-class. By the early 1930s, public attention had shifted to lower-class drug addicts in the big cities, notably vagrants and Korean migrants. CHRISTOPHER SZPILMAN (Tokyo) focused on the connection between Japanese political activists and the opium trade through the career of Fujita Isamu (1887–1955). Fujita was a close associate of right-wing senior army officers and bureaucrats while having contacts to Japan's left-wing circles. He established drug smuggling networks to China through his Soviet connections and in 1937 was involved in a transaction to purchase Persian opium for distribution in China. MARIKO IJJIMA (Tokyo) indicated during the discussion that the papers showed that opium and other narcotics are historically comparable to socially accepted stimulants, such as sugar and coffee, but add a theoretical layer, by referring to the question of illegality. According to her, the history of drugs complicates our understanding of the „transimperial“ circulation of commodities, knowledge, and migrants.

In Panel 5, JESÚS SOLIS (Cambridge, MA) presented the scope of international narcotics smuggling during the U.S. occupation of Japan (1945–1952). Initially, narcotics sold on the black market came from repatriates, often doctors and nurses, or originated from looted military stocks. By 1947, these stocks had run out, and narcotics dealers came to rely on smugglers to procure drugs from China and Korea. Solis argued that the development of an international narcotics network challenges the view that Japan's postwar black market was a domestic issue. JEFFREY ALEXANDER (Pueblo, Colorado) explored the anti-meth „shock-horror“ campaigns of the 1950s. Japan's postwar federal and municipal governments, together with police and media agencies, cultivated a sensational „drug panic“ designed both to dissuade citizens from using meth products, commonly called *hiropon*, and to fuel a concerted police campaign against non-Japanese involved

in the meth trade. The discussant, SHELDON GARON (Princeton), encouraged historians to look more closely at potential continuities between the wartime and postwar period and suggested that many of the postwar drug users probably had already become addicted during the war when the Japanese army produced large amounts of narcotics to treat wounded soldiers and civilians.

In Panel 6, MAKI UMEMURA (Cardiff) discussed how Japan emerged as a major center of the global regenerative medicine industry. She argued that despite decades of development, regenerative medicines have yet to become a widely accepted form of medicine. Umemura illustrated how in a first phase starting in the 1970s, companies were mainly technology-driven but were not commercially successful and collapsed in the early 2000s. Since then, the industry has changed its trajectory and nowadays concentrates on selling popular products instead of investing in new technologies. WILLIAM MAROTTI (Los Angeles) addressed the creation of a politicized space in Shinjuku during the late 1960s, by focusing on the role of marginalized sociopolitical identities and practices in making Shinjuku central to national political struggles over the legitimacy of protest and force. By analyzing photographs, films, and newspaper articles, Marotti reconstructed the youth counterculture figure of *fūten* („ayabouts,” resembling the American hippies) that assembled every day near Shinjuku and displayed non-productive behaviors like glue huffing. Despite their air of inaction, their presence likewise provided a pivotal catalyst to political actions centered on the Shinjuku station. OLEG BENESCH (York) examined the discourses about the consumption of magic mushrooms in the 1990s. Until their ban in 2002, magic mushrooms were widely available in Japan. Benesch showed how magic mushrooms became a locus for debates on the relationship between legality and morality with regard to intoxicating substances. An important element of these discourses was the construction of magic mushrooms as „foreign” by both users and supporters of their prohibition. DAVID CHIAVACCI (Zurich) commented that the papers fitted neatly into larger historical and political developments

of postwar Japan. For example, the ban of magic mushrooms coincided with a nationwide moral panic and the impression of a growing crime rate in Japan.

In his concluding remarks, JOHN JENNINGS (Colorado Springs) emphasized that the conference showed the importance of „consumption” as a conceptual framework for the history of drugs. The analysis of anti-drug law and campaigns and the marketing strategies of pharmaceutical companies showed that the consumers and not the drugs are at the center of drug discourses. Therefore, he argued, future research should pay even more attention to consumer agency.

Conference Overview:

Judith Vitale (University of Zurich): Opening Remarks

Raji Steineck (University of Zurich): Welcome Address

Panel 1: Knowledge and Consumption in the Pre-modern Period

Anna Andreeva (University of Heidelberg): Childbirth and Pain Relief in Medieval Japan

Jonas Rüegg (Harvard University): Goblins, Spirits and Mushrooms: Narcotics and Hallucinogens in Japan Before the Invention of „Drugs”

Discussant: David Howell (Harvard University)

Panel 2: Commerce and Diplomacy

Kōji Ozaki (Otemae University): Opium and Japan in the Late Tokugawa and the Early Meiji Eras

Ulrich Brandenburg (University of Zurich): Opium in Meiji Japan’s Internationalization: The Cases of Iran and the Ottoman Empire

Discussant: Martin Dusenberre (University of Zurich)

Keynote Lecture

John Jennings (United States Air Force Academy): „The Opium Empire” in Retrospect

Panel 3: Commerce, Consumption and Empire

William Gervase Clarence-Smith (University of London): The House of Samuel as Official Supplier of the Japanese Opium Monopoly Bureau on Taiwan, 1896–1926

Timothy Yang (University of Georgia): The Pharmaceutical Industry, Consumer Medicines, and the Culture of Self-Medication in Early Twentieth-Century Japan

Hung Bin Hsu (National Cheng Kung University): Poppy Tent as Private Paradise? The Transformation of Social Activities and Spaces of Opium Smokers in Japanese Colonial Taiwan

Discussant: Harald Fischer-Tiné (ETH Zurich)

Panel 4: Pre-War Period

Miriam Kingsberg Kadia (University of Colorado Boulder): Japan's „Belle Epoque“: Narcotics in Japanese Imperial Fiction

Judith Vitale (University of Zurich): Drugs and Inter-War Anxieties

Christopher Szpilman (Teikyo University): Narcotics and the Japanese Right Wing: The Curious Career of Fujita Isamu

Discussant: Mariko Iijima (Sophia University)

Panel 5: Post-War Period

Jesús Solís (Harvard University): Japan's Postwar Black Market: Drug Smuggling, Military Currency, and the Formation of an International Narcotics Network, 1948–1952

Jeffrey Alexander (Pueblo Community College): Horrible Hiropon: Anti-Meth Campaigns in Postwar Japan

Discussant: Sheldon Garon (Princeton University)

Panel 6: Recent Trends

Maki Umemura (Cardiff University): Resolving the Problem of „Fit“: Building the Regenerative Medicine Industry in Japan

William Marotti (University of California): The politics of Violence, Glue-Sniffing, and Liberation: Making 1968 in Japan

Oleg Benesch (University of York): Japan's Magic Mushroom Moment: Legality, Morality, and Identity

Discussant: David Chiavacci (University of Zurich)

Concluding Remarks and Final Discussion

Chair: John Jennings (United States Air Force Academy)

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